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ABSTRACT

Drawing from studies of major constituencies of Monroe Community College (MCC), this report provides an overview of available information on community, faculty, and student perceptions of MCC and of internal and external marketing strategies being considered by the college. The first sections highlight MCC's goal of promoting community awareness of the college's diversity, excellence, national recognition, and nontraditional qualities. The next sections summarize research data showing that: (1) the community was unaware of the excellence of education, the transfer success, and the diversity of technical training at MCC; (2) few people, including MCC students, know of the colleges articulation agreements with high schools and four-year colleges; (3) parents tended to feel that it was important for their children to attend a four-year college to get a good job, and that MCC attracted a higher percentage of less intelligent, less academically oriented students; (4) high school students perceived a stigma attached to community college attendance, but saw advantages in more personalized attention, cost benefits, and the retention of existing friendships; (5) adult women were less familiar with MCC than adult men; (6) while students had positive feelings about MCC and the quality of education provided, they felt that MCC was not appreciated by the community; and (7) faculty indicated that the community perceived MCC as a "high school with ashtrays." Discussions are provided of issues related to internal and external marketing, the kind of image the MCC community wishes to create, and considerations in promoting the college. Finally, the paper identifies the information that should be disseminated to parents, high school students, adult women, MCC students, faculty and staff, and student leaders. (EJV)

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RECAP OF MARKETING INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO MONROE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, 1984-85

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June 5, 1985

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RECAP OF MARKETING INFORMATION

AVAILABLE TO MONROE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

1984-85

Frances P. Osborn
June 5, 1985

RECOGNITION OF NEED

Reports from the major College constituencies stressed the need for the community to have: 1) more and 2) accurate information about the College.

Academic Governance Organization

Three of the top five AGO short-term goals for 1983-85 dealt with promoting community awareness of the quality of education at MCC known. In setting the goals for 1985-87, the faculty once again gave highest priority to community awareness, stating the goal as follows:

--Improve community awareness of the accomplishments of MCC and the College's image with respect to:
- . excellence of education and national recognition of that excellence
- . transfer success of our transfer students
- . diversity and excellence of technical training available (Semrau, p. 3)

1983-84 Strategic Planning Committee

The '83-4 SPC Internal Sub-committee's final report noted:

--While attitudes toward the College are generally quite favorable, perceptions of what the College is and should be doing vary....Some perceptions are conflicting. (Lundberg, p. 6)

1984-85 Strategic Planning Committee

This year's SPC recommended:

--Focus marketing on long-term, recognizable themes; market our diversity, excellence, national recognition, non-traditional qualities. (Osborn, p. 4)

Marketing Committee

Finally, the Lloyd Marketing Committee Report recommended

--Improve understanding of the role of the community college generally and MCC in particular among business, political, community, education, media leaders.

COMMUNITY DOES NOT HAVE ACCURATE INFORMATION

Although most people think they know about MCC, in fact they do not. They are unaware of the size of the College, its number and diversity of programs, and the variety of sports, clubs, and extracurricular activities. After guessing the U of R to be the largest area college, they were impressed to learn MCC was, feeling that if so many people attended, the College must offer value. Some who associated size as good when applied to the U of R, felt it led to large classes and parking problems at MCC. (Wolff, p.29)

Just as most people did not know the size of MCC, neither did they know of the diversity and number of its degree programs. (Wolff, p.6) Parents did not believe community colleges offered comprehensive programs (Wolff, p. 19), ironic, because MCC takes special pride in its comprehensiveness. While most people felt we offered technical programs with practical applications, relatively few were aware of transfer programs. (Wolff, p. 17, 28)

Awareness of MCC was universal, for virtually everyone knew someone who had attended the college. This, however, turned out to be a disadvantage, for most people felt they knew about the College just from having heard about it. But, "As MCC was contrasted to other local colleges, the 'information' most people used for their judgments was inaccurate and biased against the College." (Wolff, p. 22) The Black Study noted the important target groups of 18-24 and 45-54 (those attending college or sending their children) lacked information about the college. (Black, p. 5)

In spite of people not knowing as much as they should about the College or holding inaccurate information, they held positive views of MCC. Seventy-five percent felt MCC was meeting the Community's needs (Black, p.4), and most felt students could receive a quality education. (Wolff, p. 35-6; Black, p. 4)

EASE OF TRANSFER NOT KNOWN

Few people, including our own students, knew of articulation and 2 plus 2 agreements (Wolff, p. 41), but after they understood the advantages, were impressed by them.

Still worse, only one-third of the people realized MCC credits were transferable to all 4-year colleges and universities. Ten percent felt they transferred only to New York State schools, 23% felt only a few colleges and universities would accept them, and 32% were unable to answer. (Black, p. 2)

It is clear that the community as a whole needs clear information on the transferability of our credits. It seems, though, from our Admissions study (Felicetti), that our incoming students either know that MCC credits transfer or have faith that they will, for most plan to study for an advanced degree. In 1984, of the 5,593 students indicating their educational goals, 3,337 planned to get advanced degrees. Only 368 planned to get no degree; 1,888 planned to stop with an Associate Degree. Perhaps we can conclude that, while they realize our credits will transfer, they need more information on articulation agreements and 2 plus 2 programs.

PERCEPTIONS OF MCC

Perceptions, even though frequently inaccurate, are important to marketing, for they underlie people's actions and beliefs. It's interesting, therefore, to examine the perceptions identified in the Wolff and Flynn/Osborn studies. The Wolff Study covers perceptions of parents, high school juniors and seniors, adult women, and MCC students; the Flynn/Osborn studies, MCC faculty, staff, and student leaders.

Parents

Parents above all wanted an education that would give their children the necessary qualifications for a profession. (Wolff, p. 11) Since they believed community colleges offered less access to job interviews and business recruiters, they felt it important for their children to transfer to a non-community college to get good job. They supported attending a community college as an introduction to college and an opportunity to investigate careers, but felt community colleges were less demanding and provided a less competitive atmosphere. (Wolff, p. 15, 18) Since MCC's admission policies were not stringent, they felt MCC attracted a higher percentage of less intelligent, less academically oriented students. (Wolff, p. 32)

Somewhat paradoxically, parents had a sufficiently positive image of MCC to permit their own children to attend, were impressed with the programs and staff, and felt the community was fortunate to have a facility of such quality available. (Wolff, p. 35)

High School Students

High school students want college to prepare them for a career that will provide increased pay and responsibilities. They thought there was a stigma attached to attending a community college, and there were few extracurricular activities. They believed students at MCC had been rejected by other colleges. Still they felt MCC offered more personalized attention, intimate atmosphere, significant cost benefits, and the retention of existing friendships. (Wolff, pp. 17-18)

Adult Women

Although women were less familiar with MCC than men, they felt graduates were likely to get good jobs in the county. Women do not absorb the MCC advertising that explains programs available to them. (Black, p. 6)

This is supported by the Lundberg report: "There is general appreciation of MCC's career and transfer programs...in terms of the "traditional" college age student. [but] Only in isolated instances...of the work with returning women, job retraining, and adult populations." (Lundberg, p. 19)

The adult women in the Wolff Study, who were either attending or interested in attending college, had a very positive image of MCC, regarding the school as affordable, high quality, and supportive. They liked MCC's flexible scheduling and a broad student base that made them feel comfortable in class. (Wolff, p. 17) They, too, believed MCC was held in low esteem in the community, but felt it was honored outside the Rochester area. (Wolff, p. 36)

MCC Students

MCC students felt the College maintained high standards, their courses were rigorous, and it was difficult to get good grades. (Wolff, p. 19) They were positive about MCC and felt the teaching staff were concerned, committed to quality, and offered more personal attention than was available elsewhere. However, they believe MCC is not appreciated by the community; many were ashamed or embarrassed to admit they were attending the College. (Wolff, p. 35)

MCC Faculty and Staff

There is a persistent belief that in the community MCC is seen as a "high school with ashtrays." The phrase was cited by 6 of the 7 MCC faculty and staff groups (Flynn/Osborn, p. 3), and the high school students. (Wolff, p. 19) A rephrasing "glorified high school" was given by the MCC student leaders.

The faculty and staff believed this to be a common community perception but felt our alumni and students who had experienced the College felt differently.

The phrase was not mentioned by the adult women or parents. One wonders if the phrase stems from the ease of admittance of MCC, which is somewhat like public high schools, plus the look of the building. Perhaps we need castellated towers. SMG participants noted MCC's physical plant looked like a giant high school and featured no campus or campus life. (Wolff, p. 37) The MCC students group added that everything, including the library, was closed on Sunday, increasing the non-campus feeling, and noted the high school-like atmosphere pervaded the student activities center. (Wolff, p. 40)

Faculty and staff believe MCC is seen as a college of last resort, agreeing once again with the high school students and the MCC student leaders.

On a more positive note, the faculty and staff feel MCC is known for offering an inexpensive, quality education, for graduates recognized as high quality by business and industry, and for open access and reasonable admissions standards. The latter was not always seen as positive by other groups.

MCC Student Leaders

The student leaders were more positive than the faculty about how MCC was viewed by the community, although they cited "last resort," and "glorified high school." Most painful to those of us on the faculty, they believe the community sees faculty as rejects from four-year schools.

They felt the College, however, was seen as state-of-the-art technologically, affordable, flexible, well-administered, a valuable community service, with quality instruction.

Internal Marketing

While most of us have felt a need to make the community more aware of Monroe Community College, perceptions data make it clear we are not marketing ourselves back to our own constituencies. We need to promote awareness of and pride in the quality of our programs, our staff, and our students. Sometimes the community people had a higher regard for MCC than its own people.

Our own students do not seem aware of the calibre and diversity of our progams; the achievements of our current students and alumni; the transferability of our courses, articulation agreements, and 2 plus 2 programs; the reputation of the faculty and administration. Some

communication device is needed that has a broader function than the MONROE DOCTRINE. The student leaders suggested they wanted to read CAMPUS NEWS. That might help, but something even broader is needed that would include alumni achievements and community and professional involvement of faculty, staff, and students.

For our students to feel embarrassed that they attend MCC is dismaying, but understandable if they feel they are perceived by the community as a "collection of miscreants who were disinterested and incapable of pursuing serious academics."(Wolff, p. 33, 37)

External Marketing

Our marketing should look outward rather than inward for direction, more related to the consumer and less to the producer. (Lloyd) It should show a keen interest in the needs, perceptions, preferences, and satisfaction of the constituents, relying on systematic information collection procedures. (Lloyd) This is remarkably like the advice in A PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE, by Tom Peters, "First, take exceptional care of your customers...via superior service and superior quality. Second, constantly innovate." (Forbes)

Participants agreed that college advertising and promotional efforts should be informative, not sales pitches. Brochures and direct mail were favored because they were more likely to be informative; radio and television seemed less influential. Information from friends was seen as most credible and superceded all information provided by the College. (Wolff, p. 26) Friends are the source of information especially for 18-24 year-olds and those 65 and older. (Black, p. 4) This is somewhat distressing since such information is often inaccurate and biased against the College.

Parents and relatives influenced college choice, followed by teachers and guidance counselors. (Wolff, p. 23) Our admissions data support this. (Felicetti)

Help in Deciding to Apply

Advice of Parents	2,086
Advice of MCC Student	1,572
Advice of Guidance Counselor	1,457
Advice of teacher	343
Visit by Admissions Counselor	260
Admissions Interview	195
Advertising--Radio/TV	139
MCC Professor	118
Advertising--Newspaper	87
Other	2,119

The "Other" above is intriguing, suggesting there is another powerful force in college decisions, or people don't know what made up their mind.

What Image Do We Want To Create?

Faculty and staff want the College to be viewed as high quality, university parallel, that also prepares graduates for job placement. Student leaders agree: "quality institution, challenging, academically viable, reputable, students well prepared."

Faculty and staff want to be recognized as quality. Again, student leaders agree: "quality educators."

Faculty and staff want the College to be seen as responsive to community needs: educational, social, cultural, and recreational. Student leaders: "More than just a college." Students leaders added one other item: affordable. (Flynn/Osborn)

Admissions data "Reasons for Choosing MCC" indicate some strong influences for college choice:

Location	23.9%
Programs	18.2%
Cost	18.2%
Academic reputation	11.0
Better job	10.5

(Felicetti)

Wolff concurs. "As the college was local and familiar, parental involvement was minimal and the perceived cost advantages of MCC generally negated the need to investigate other schools. Some...selected MCC because it was relatively inexpensive and offered quality programs in areas of interest, [others]...because of reduced cost."

CONSIDERATIONS IN PROMOTING THE COLLEGE

Start with MCC

Some of our most effective marketing is done by the people in our College. A second look at what influenced the decision of those who came to MCC (Felicetti) is revealing.

MCC student, admissions counselor, or professor	- 2,145
Parents	- 2,086
High school guidance counselor or teacher	- 1,800
Advertising--radio, TV, newspaper	- 226

Every effort that we make to inform our College community, and convince them of the quality, effectiveness, and diversity of our programs pays off handsomely. This was recognized in one of the Strategic Planning Committee's recommendations, "...all members of the college must assume an obligation for recruitment, to assist the Admissions Office." (Osborn, p. 2) We need to make the College community aware of how crucial each one, students, faculty, and staff, is to the process.

Although Malcolm Forbes was referring to business when he commented on this, the principle applies to MCC; just substitute education divisions for business divisions: "Customer relations goes far beyond the sales force. It must include the accounting department, purchasing department, manufacturing, engineering, etc." (Forbes) George Weidemer has a sign at the Cable-Weidemer store which reads: Every member of this organization is a salesman. That's true of colleges, too.

We should continue to assess the attitudes and understanding of our students, faculty, and staff. There were clear indications in marketing reports that parts of the College community did not have accurate information or carried damaging perceptions. We should work to make information available and understandable and we should take steps to change defeating views. The College should regularly conduct focus groups like those done by Flynn/Osborn, of students, faculty, staff, and the group not yet addressed, alumni. As a check on the in-house focus groups, additional focus groups should be done by an external party.

Segment the Market

One of Wolff's recommendations is that advertising for MCC should be highly segmented...[in content and form] in order to appeal to the disparate groups which MCC is attempting to attract." (Wolff, p. 8) Let's take the term "advertising" in its broadest sense to include all information.

We need to tailor information, with a slightly different message, in a different form, delivered to a different location, to each constituency: MCC community; parents; community of Monroe; community outside our SMSA; high school students, guidance counselors, principals, teachers; women returning to education; groups addressed by Community Services, such as small business owners.

To do that, we need to monitor the needs, perceptions, and what appeals to each constituency, along with the changing demographics and job predictions. We need internal information: what each segment means to MCC in terms of FTEs, good will, our mission, relationship to the community, and costs to the College. Once that information is in place, we

can weigh our current efforts and determine where best to apply our time, talent, and funds.

Following is a recap of the information we have so far. Characteristically, groups hold antithetical notions at the same time.

EXTERNAL MARKET SEGMENTS

Parents
- education should qualify their children for a profession
- community colleges have less opportunity for prestigious job placement
- c.c.'s are less demanding academically
- MCC has impressive programs and quality

High school students
- education is for a career, more money, more responsibility
- MCC students are 4-year college rejects
- MCC offers personalized attention, intimate atmosphere, cost benefits, retention of friendships

Adult women
- education is for better jobs
- An MCC education provides good jobs in Monroe County
- MCC is high quality, supportive, flexible

INTERNAL MARKET SEGMENTS

MCC students
- MCC has high standards, concerned and quality staff, provides personal attention
- MCC is regarded so low in the community it is embarrassing to admit you attend

Faculty and staff
- Community sees students as last resort and the College as a high school with ashtrays
- Community feels we provide a quality education
- Business and industry regard our graduates highly

Student leaders
- MCC seen as last resort, glorified high school
- Faculty seen as 4-year college rejects
- MCC seen as having state-of-the-art technology and quality instruction, being affordable, flexible, well-administered
- MCC is seen as a valuable community service

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